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SUBJECT: MUSEVENI APPOINTS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONERS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: President Museveni named four commissioners to the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) on May 7, finally filling the vacancies after six crippling months of inactivity. The appointments will allow the UHRC to resume hearing cases of human rights violations, which had stalled awaiting the new appointments. Some human rights activists have criticized the appointments, expressing concern that the new appointees are too close to the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party. Over the past year, the UHRC had shown increased signs of independence. Given these concerns we will watch the new commission closely. End Summary.

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President Names New Human Rights Commissioners
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¶2. (U) Chief Justice Benjamin Odoki swore-in four new UHRC commissioners on May 13. One Commissioner is yet to be named to the seven-member quasi-judicial body. Parliament established UHRC in 1996 to investigate human rights violations, sensitize the public on human rights issues, and make recommendations to Parliament for promoting human rights. The Commission is also responsible for monitoring the government's compliance with international treaty and convention obligations on human rights.

¶3. (SBU) UHRC Director of Complaints and Investigations Roslyn Segawa told PolOff that UHRC staff felt relieved that a new team had been named to conduct tribunal hearings and make judgments after six months of inactivity. She said that over 450 cases had been stalled since November 2008 due to the absence of commissioners. Segawa reported that the new commissioners were being briefed and, given their varied backgrounds, were engaged in relevant training. The top priority of the UHRC going forward would be to reduce the case backlog and increase efforts to pressure the Government to compensate torture victims, she explained.

¶4. (U) The Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (FHRI), Human Rights Network (HURINET), and Human Rights Watch Africa released a joint statement welcoming the appointments. The local human rights organizations stressed the importance of the human rights body in providing an avenue by which victims of abuse could seek redress. They expressed concern, however, that the new appointees were too close to the ruling NRM party and reminded the new commissioners of their constitutional mandate to address human rights issues objectively. The coalition called on the Government to comply with UHRC recommendations made in its annual report to Parliament, pushed for the enactment of anti-torture legislation, and urged the Government to compensate torture victims in accordance with UHRC rulings.

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Biographical Information
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¶5. (U) The new commissioners include the following:

-- Meddie Kaggwa, 54, is the new Chair of the UHRC. A lawyer by profession, Kaggwa was a private attorney prior to his appointment to the UHRC. He previously served as Minister of State in the

President's Office, a Constituent Assembly delegate, and an NRM Member of Parliament representing Kawempe South, Kampala District. Kaggwa also served as a member of the East African Legislative Assembly until 2006 and was a member of the Commission that gathered views for the enactment of the 1995 Constitution.

-- Joseph Etima, 68, is a former Commissioner General of the Uganda Prisons Service. He worked as a Commissioner on the United Nations Commission for Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice and as a member of the UN Professional and Technical Advisory Board for Correctional and Criminal Justice. Etima has a degree in correctional administration and a certificate in international humanitarian law and international criminal justice.

-- Agaba Maguru, 49, is a private attorney and the founder of Agaba and Company Advocates. He is a member of the Uganda Law Council, a supervisory and regulatory body for lawyers.

-- Amooti Katebalirwe, 67, is a Professor of Political Economy and Literary Communication at Makerere University, Kampala. He previously worked as a Program Officer at the National Council for Children and as a National Coordinator for UNDP. He is a former member of the Media Council and Kyambogo University Council.

-- Miriam Wangadya, 44, will serve his third term on the UHRC. A lawyer by profession, Wangadya worked with Dagira and Company Advocates before she was appointed to the UHRC in 1996.

-- Constantine Karusoke, 66, will serve his third term on the UHRC. He is a former Member of the National Resistance Council (former parliament) representing Ntoroko, Bundibugyo District. A teacher by profession, Karusoke graduated has a Bachelor's Degree of Education

KAMPALA 00000628 002 OF 002

from Makerere University and has served in various senior positions within the Ministry of Education.

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Comment
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16. (SBU) While unfortunately delayed, we welcome the Government's appointments to the UHRC to allow the Commission to resume handling human rights cases, serving as an important avenue for redress on human rights violations. UHRC under its previous leadership demonstrated significant independence on key human rights cases, boosting its credibility with human rights groups and the general public. With two commissioners returning and four well-qualified replacements, we remain optimistic that the new commissioners will continue efforts to strengthen the institution. Limited technical personnel and financial resources, however, will likely continue to hinder greater effectiveness. Undue political influence on the commissioners, particularly in the run-up to the 2011 presidential and parliamentary elections, is also of concern. Post will engage the UHRC and the Government when necessary to stress the importance of protecting the human rights body's mandate.
BROWNING